

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9510

AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY

AMCONSUL ASMARA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY JIDDA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY

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EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS

SUBJ: CISCO II

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1. LOCAL AP OFFICE HAS LITTLE INFORMATION OTHER THAN THAT CONTAINED IN STORY. IT IS THEIR UNDERSTANDING THAT MOHAMMAD ALI, WHO USED TO BE SIDEKICK OF OSMAN SABBE, HAS TAKEN OVER AND SABBE HAS LOST OUT COMPLETELY AS RESULT OF ORGANIZATIONAL DISPUTES DESCRIBED IN STORY. MOHAMMAD ALI HINTED THAT OVERALL DISPUTE BASED ON MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN PROBLEMS (BOTH SABBE AND ALI ARE MUSLIMS.)

2. EMBOFF ASKED AMCIT AP REPORTER IF ANYONE HAD POINTED OUT TO ALI USG'S NO-BLACKMAIL POSITION. REPORTER SAID HE THOUGHT NOT IN THIS SPECIFIC CONTACT. HOWEVER, HE SAID, IN PREVIOUS CONTACTS WITH ELF REPRESENTATIVES HE HAS FORMED IMPRESSION THEY PROBABLY DO NOT BELIEVE THIS POLICY IS UNIFORMLY APPLIED. REPORTER CITES FACT THAT PFLP PERSONNEL IN BEIRUT TOLD HIM PERSONALLY THAT THEY RECEIVED LARGE QUANTITY OF ARMS FOR RELEASE GALLAGHER-DYKES. AP REPORTER SAID THAT ALTHOUGH HE PERSONALLY CONFIDENTIAL

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DOES NOT BELIEVE THIS, PEOPLE IN PFLP MILIEU PROBABLY DO, AND

THIS SORT OF TALK PRESUMABLY REACHES ELP REPRESENTATIVES IN
MIDEAST.

3. IN DISCUSSION IT EVOLVED THAT AP REPORTER RECOGNIZED IN CROWD COVERING AMB. BROWN YESTERDAY A LOCAL PHOTOGRAPHER HE BELIEVES HAS JUST RETURNED FROM SEVERAL WEEKS IN ERITREA. ON BEHALF OF AP HE PLANS TO SEEK OUT PHOTOGRAPHER FOR STORY OR PHOTOS. IF ANYTHING OF INTEREST CONCERNING FOREIGN CAPTIVES DEVELOPS, HE SAID HE WILL PASS IT ON TO EMB.

4. IN CASE AP NEW YORK DID NOT PRINT ENTIRE STORY, FOLLOWING IS VERSION FILED FROM BEIRUT NIGHT APRIL 8, PLUS ADDITIONAL INFORMATION SUPPLIED BY AP BEIRUT IN RESPONSE TO QUERY FROM AP NEW YORK OFFICE.

5. BEGIN TEXT: BEIRUT (AP) ERITREAN REBELS HAVE THREATENED AGAIN TO KILL TWO CAPTIVE AMERICAN COMMUNICATIONS TECHNICIANS AND A BRITISH DIPLOMAT UNLESS RANSOMS ARE PAID BY THEIR GOVERNMENTS, AN ERITREAN SPOKESMAN SAID HERE THURSDAY.

THE AMERICANS ARE JIM HARRELL OF MILWAUKEE, WISC., AND STEVE CAMPBELL OF SAN LEANDRO, CALIFORNIA, BOTH TECHNICIANS AT KAGNEW COMMUNICATIONS BASE NEAR ASMARA, CAPITAL OF NORTHERN ERITREA.

HARRELL AND CAMPBELL WERE ABDUCTED BY ERITREAN REBELS FROM KAGNEW LAST JULY 14. THEY HAVE BEEN HELD IN AN ERITREAN POPULAR FORCES BASE SINCE THEN. THE THIRD CAPTIVE, BASIL TAYLOR, HONORARY BRITISH CONSUL IN ASMARA, WAS KIDNAPPED IN DECEMBER.

MOHAMMAD ALI, ERITREAN LIBERATION FRONT SPOKESMAN, SAID THE ELF HAS DEMANDED \$3,000,000 FOR THE RELEASE OF THE TWO AMERICANS AND ANOTHER UNSPECIFIED AMOUNT FOR THE RELEASE OF TAYLOR.

IN MESSAGES RELAYED TO THE US AND BRITISH EMBASSIES IN KHARTOUM, SUDAN, THROUGH THE ELF KHARTOUM OFFICE EARLIER THIS MONTH, THE FRONT THREATENED TO KILL THE THREE UNLESS SOME MONEY WAS DELIVERED BY THE END OF APRIL, HE SAID

"THE THREE HAVE EXACTLY 21 DAYS LEFT," HE ADDED. THE THREAT
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REFLECTS A RIFT BETWEEN THE CIVILIAN AND MILITARY COMMANDS OF THE ELF OVER THE FATE OF FOREIGN CAPTIVES. THE REBELS THREATENED LAST SEPT 15 TO KILL HARRELL AND CAMPBELL WITH A NUMBER OF OTHER CAPTIVES UNLESS THE US STOPPED MILITARY AID TO ETHIOPIA, FROM WHICH THE REBELS ARE SEEKING INDEPENDENCE. THEY ALSO DEMANDED A RANSOM OF \$5 MILLION. THE CIVILIAN COMMAND PRESSURED THE MILITARY LEADERS TO DROP THE THREAT AND INSURE THE RELEASE OF THE CAPTIVES WITHOUT ANY CONDITIONS. PRESSURE ALSO CAME FROM

SAUDI ARABIA, IRAQ AND SYRIA. ALI ANNOUNCED LAST JAN. 26 THAT ALL CAPTIVES WOULD BE RELEASED SOON, UNCONDITIONALLY. "THIS COULD TAKE A FEW WEEKS BUT THE IMPORTANT THING IS THAT THE DECISION HAS BEEN TAKEN," HE SAID. HE HAD NO CLEAR EXPLANATION FOR THE CHANGE BUT REFERRED TO "ORGANIZATIONAL DISPUTES" THAT EMERGED AT AN ELF MEETING IN KHARTOUM IN MARCH.

HE SAID THE ELF'S FOREIGN MISSION, THE FRONT'S INFORMATION AND AID-SEEKING ARM, RELINQUISHED AT THE KHARTOUM MEETING ITS ROLE AS REPRESENTATIVE OF THE POPULAR LIBERATION FORCES. THE ERITREAN POPULAR FRONT IS ONE OF THE ERITREAN LIBERATION FRONT'S TWO FIGHTING GROUPS. IT IS THE GROUP HOLDING HARRELL AND CAMPBELL.

(END TEXT)

6. AP BEIRUT THEN TOLD BY AP NEW YORK THAT RONALD MISHALKE HAD BEEN AMONG THE THREE AMERICAN CAPTIVES AND ASKED WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM. MOHAMMAD ALI SAID THAT HARRELL AND CAMPBELL WERE THE ONLY TWO AMERICANS WITH HIS GROUP. THE OTHER CAPTIVES ARE WITH THE REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL, WHICH IS THE OTHER GROUP UNDER THE ELF UMBRELLA ORGANIZATION. MOHAMMAD ALI SAID THE FOREIGN REPRESENTATIVE BODY OSMAN SABBE WAS RUNNING HAS LOST ITS CLAIM TO SPEAK FOR ONE OF THE TWO GROUPS, THE ONE HOLDING HARRELL, CAMPBELL AND TAYLOR, AND MOHAMMAD ALI IS TAKING OVER AS SPOKESMAN FOR THEM.

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